

Key Aspects of Leadership in Business Organizations under the Conditions of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Kiril Dimitrov

University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria

kiril.dimitrov@unwe.bg

Abstract. The paper reviews emerging aspects of leadership in business organizations under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic as identified two levels of its realization – on an organizational one and individual one, cultural approach to leadership, pursuing leadership through human resources and appropriate communications, considering the opinions and experience of outstanding individuals in the business world.

Keywords. Corporate culture, Crisis management, Personnel management, Natural Disasters and Their Management

1. Introduction

The times of crises are traditionally considered as promising opportunities of renegotiating and reaching new consensus among constituencies of target companies, pursuing irreversible acceleration in their organizational and market performance through social innovations, new business models, better employee engagement and implementation of new technologies. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has already disclosed some interrelated nuances as health, economic and financial ones. On one hand, the occurrence of all these contradictory phenomena in the business world is tightly related with timely planning and conducting of change management initiatives by senior executives.

On the other hand, change management is interwoven with performing of leadership efforts in companies, simultaneously striving for sustainable increase in profitability and organizational growth. *That is why the purpose of this report is set to review the emergence of key aspects of leadership in business organizations under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic.* Literature review, content analysis and critical analysis represent the applied research methods in this paper.

2. Diverse aspects of undertaken leadership initiatives

The solving (resolving or absolving) of pending business related issues, originating from the development of the current Covid-19 pandemic, provoke leaders to pursue survival and new competitive advantages for their companies by means of discussing, planning and implementing necessary cultural changes in their organizations [1, 2]. Furthermore, the importance of undertaking deliberate leadership interventions, continuously shaping the image of the aspired organizational culture during the entire realization of the employee life-cycle in the company, is also emphasized. Thus, relying on good practices of succeeding companies during the current crisis, O'Boyle and Hickman [1] apply the process approach by introducing a set of three steps in order to create an organizational culture with potential to inspire personnel members (Table 1).

Table 1. Creation of aspired organizational culture by managers

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Description</i>
1. Capture	Managers are expected to take mental snapshots of the ongoing work-related situations in the companies in a timely manner by applying cultural analysis (What happened? How it felt to be a part of the respective event? What worked and what didn't work? How to proceed in a similar situation in the future?).
2. Codify	Based on the advantages and disadvantages of the observed cultural manifestations, managers are expected: (a) to create the appropriate language, intended to support important aspirational cultural attributes, (b) to identify target cultural forms subject to unlearning by the personnel members and undertake concrete actions to discontinue their existence, (c) to find unique answers of what brings organizational success under normal work conditions or during the occurrence of key marker events, and (d) to analyze the realized ideation (invention) process in the company ("Who originated the idea? How did the idea get evaluated? Who was part of the decision-making process? What was the approval process?").
3. Communicate	Managers are expected to share meaningful stories of success, supporting their employees' hope in the future and clearly relating their meanings with key aspects of the aspirational organizational culture.
Source: [1].	

Deliberate change interventions in organizational cultures are recommended not only to the specific case of this crisis, but also to any key marker events in the future with potentially great devastating impact on the respective business (i.e. disruptions) whose negative short-term effects and long-term consequences for the company may be mitigated or even inverted by the proactive actions of the managers, monitoring the business environment, detecting early warning signals and adopting a strategic approach to build or strengthen organizational resilience [2]. Reshaping organizational culture to one, characterized as strong, preserving only a small set of core values, providing opportunities for leaders and their followers to transpose company mission in each work-related decision and activity even in situations when shifts in priorities are unavoidable. A structured, consultant-led discussion for the creation of supporting organizational culture is proposed, based on several questions (see Table 2).

Forrester, Hillman and McDevitt [3] who reflect on the results of a global leadership survey [4], limit the span of their analysis to outline some emerging changes in organizational culture only in the short run, because of the high unpredictability in the (business) environment that hampers the prognostication in the mid- and long-run. Managers' intentions of restarting organizational growth and driving positive cultural change for this purpose are not questioned, simply the possible initial culturally congruent strategic positions of companies (i.e. "distinct cultural pathways") at the threshold of this crisis are mapped and succinctly described, classified by their potential of ensuring faster recovery – "strengthened and enhanced", "adaptive and recalibrating" and "arrived and deprived". Thus, several characteristics of aspired organizational culture are formulated (i.e. strong, managed and constructive). Furthermore, two basic nuances in the relationship "pandemic-related changes - dominating organizational culture", pertaining to the successful performance of organizational leaders, are outlined:

- The need of understanding cultural changes in context

- The precision in measuring of the employee opinions in relation to establishing a new, negotiated, workplace social contract that may balance the interests of constituencies under the new conditions.

Table 2. A list of specific questions, intended for discussing the creation of “thriving work culture”

<i>The questions...</i>
1. What opportunities exist to strengthen and reinforce the organization's purpose, mission and vision?
2. What opportunities exist to capitalize on positive brand sentiments gained from demonstrating organizational values with employees and customers?
3. What organizational values need to be institutionalized to further localize effective decision-making?
4. How can innovation and speed to market accelerate?
5. What key leadership messages need to be amplified?
6. What cultural values in action need to be in the spotlight?
7. Are leaders and managers engaged to drive a culture of performance on their teams?
Source: [2].

Based on this analysis, concrete recommendations are provided to founders and leaders in contemporary business organizations in order to collaborate better with their employees (Table 3). But this leadership initiative should be viewed predominantly as an integral part of searching a new consensus and new balance with all firm's constituencies in their incessant quest of solving the issue of external adaptation [5].

Table 3. Preparatory leadership initiatives at the first stage of solving the external adaptation organizational issue

Leadership initiatives	Specific actions
1. Listen with empathy	1.1. Creation of safe space for employees to share their experiences and opinions without being reproached or punished. 1.2. Building employee trust through deliberate actions, incarnating “credibility, reliability, low self-orientation, and compassion”.
2. Measure and gather the voice of the personnel	2.1. Choosing an appropriate way of measuring the organizational culture. 2.2. Pursuing strong fit between dominating organizational culture and the expressed opinions by employees.
3. Renegotiate together	3.1. Producing win-win imaginative and innovative agreements with employees and all other stakeholders by means of renegotiations and cross-functional conversations. 3.2. Indirectly supporting renegotiations and cross-functional conversations among constituencies by applying acquired culture data insights.
Source: [3].	

The emphasis on the leadership contributions of the highest rank executives (CEOs) in solving business-related issues, originating from the Covid-19 pandemic, discloses the

existence of diverse attitudes to needed culture changes in the companies in order to retain their competitive advantage or gain a new one. These attitudes represent direct citations from interviews or public speeches, made by outstanding CEOs of leading companies or analyses by respective researchers, based on shared opinions by such organizational leaders (Table 4).

Table 4. Diverse attitudes to needed culture changes in the companies, expressed by CEOs

CEOs...	Expressed attitudes...
Dee Ann Turner, former vice president talent and human resources for Chick-Fil-A, CEO of Dee Ann Turner & Associates	Re-establishment of the balance in the existing “employer-employee” relationship due to an expected increase in employer bargaining power in times of Covid-19 pandemic and immediately after it.
James Rodgers, founder of The Diversity Coach, leading strategist in the field of diversity management	Conducting timely reassessment of the current organizational culture and outlining its advantages in congruence with the requirements of the “the new reality” in order to maintain or increase company competitiveness.
Jane Delgado, president and CEO of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health	Identified emerging organizational values in the pandemic as mutual trust, interconnectedness, mutual responsibilities.
Ginger Hardage, former senior VP of Culture and Communications at Southwest Airlines, founder of Unstoppable Cultures	Forming the employees as a priority constituency for a while – “when employees feel safe and heard can they begin to make customers feel the same way.”
Source: [3].	

Seeking a sustainable advantage through human resources during Covid-19 pandemic, stimulates organizational leaders to reassess implemented practices in workforce management in respective entities [6]. Thus, their leadership interventions become oriented to [6, 7, 8]:

- Coping with management of dispersed workforce, pursuing the achievement of high levels of flexibility.
- Applying creative approaches in scheduling of performed work activities, working time and workplace location for their employees while preserving the health and ensuring safety to their subordinates.
- Introducing mass use of IT solutions, supporting HR performance within most of the components in the implemented HRM system and/or talent management system in their companies.
- Finding and hiring the right people through intensive use of remote interviewing, assessments and electronic platforms that facilitate the connection between candidates and jobs, and demonstrations of high respect to temporary hired employees not only with IT background.
- Realizing the activities, associated with employee learning and career development in the business organization by implementing cost-effective digital training in several directions: (a) developing important managerial skills for the crisis (as remote working, crisis leadership, specific executorial capabilities), (b) implementing industry and task-group specific upskilling, focused on changing work, and (c) stabilizing the new leadership behaviors that reflect formulation of clear goals,

formation of focused teams, practicing rapid decision making, and adhering to higher organizational agility.

- Managing and rewarding employee performance that always requires the maintenance of transparent link between preliminary defined goals of the incumbents and pursued business priorities, basely categorizing employees as high performers and truly lagging ones, but bearing in mind that Covid-19 conditions impose introducing larger flexibility in this HRM sub-sphere.
- Tailoring the experience of different personnel categories (individual contributors, middle managers, senior executives, remote and onsite employees, etc.) by introducing official norms of working, boosting employee engagement and inclusion. The decision analysis here may be based at least on several criteria as type of necessary talent, importance of performed roles, required collaboration intensity, etc.
- Optimizing workforce planning and strategy through reassessing the critical roles for the current business situation in the respective industries, intensifying the interactions with the specific skill pools of the respective companies, implementation of richer talent systems (i.e. artificial-intelligence-enabled tools).
- Paying closer attention to leaders' conduct of employee mourning process in companies through: (a) demonstrations of respect to human experiences, feelings, emotions, losses, challenges and provision of space for their public sharing with colleagues during virtual team meetings, and (b) search of the right mix between empathy and compassion in their daily employee relations.

Establishing appropriate organizational communications for the Covid-19 crisis represents another leadership challenge that is expected to contribute not only to ensuring adequate organizational responses to it, but also to gaining and retaining competitive advantage through human resources, because leader's efforts in this sphere may "create clarity, build resilience, and catalyze positive (organizational, team, individual) change" [9] by preserving employee safety, facilitating employee adjustment and emotional coping in the new situation, and helping them "put their experience into context and draw meaning from it", thus supporting a sustainable increase in employee job performance [9] (Table 5).

Table 5. Characteristics of organizational communications during Covid-19 crisis

Stage of crisis Characteristics...	Resolve	Resilience	Return/ reimagination/ reform
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Dominating feelings of employees...</i>	confused, anxious	Uneasy, worn down	ready for change, a sense of loss
<i>Strong needs of employees...</i>	Facts, not speculation Clear instructions for how to protect their safety	Clarity on longer term plans Positive stories Chances to connect	A new vision for the future A chance to grieve
<i>Ranking types of information to be communicated...</i>	1. Instructing (encouraging calm & staying safe) 2. Adjusting (to change and uncertainty) 3. Internalizing	1. Instructing (encouraging calm & staying safe) 2. Adjusting (to change and uncertainty) 3. Internalizing	1. Internalizing 2. Adjusting (to change and uncertainty) 3. Instructing (encouraging calm & staying safe)

Table 5. Characteristics of organizational communications during Covid-19 crisis (cont'd)

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Superior leadership practices...</i>	Applying different forms of information to support employee safety, coping mentally, and connecting to a deeper sense of purpose and stability. Providing needed information in a succinct way to the employees. Building mutual trust.	Multiple repeating of target information. Increasing the effectiveness of leadership and employee loyalty by demonstrations of honesty, vulnerability, and maintenance of transparency. Restoring confidence by emphasis on the positive and strong communal bonds.	Establishing a clear vision, or mantra, for how the organization and its people will emerge after the crisis.
Source: [9].			

The application of the socio-psychological management method “managers’ giving a lead” may also be used as an efficient means of bringing forth the valuable experience of prominent organizational leaders in coping with business-related aspects of challengeable organizational situations by exploring their interviews [10, 11, 12] (Table 6).

Table 6. Opinions of prominent business leaders in relation to effective coping with the crisis by companies – content analysis

#	<i>Expressed beliefs in successful leading of companies during the crisis</i>
(1)	(2)
1. Alain Bejjani, CEO of Majid Al Futtaim (MAF)	<p>CHANGE & CULTURE:</p> <p>1.1. Implementing purpose-driven digital transformation, supporting values (bold, passionate, and together) and related behavioral norms.</p> <p>1.2. Design and implementation of fundamental changes in operating business models.</p> <p>CRISIS MANAGEMENT:</p> <p>1.3. Exercising strict control over company costs (“What do we really need?”).</p> <p>1.4. Liquidity is considered as the most important buffer.</p> <p>1.5. Organizational resilience is built during good times.</p> <p>1.6. The essentials (strong health and well-being) are the greatest drivers of economic value creation.</p> <p>ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT:</p> <p>1.7. Selling of experiences, not services to customers.</p> <p>HRM:</p> <p>1.8. Employees are viewed as company’s most important and precious asset.</p> <p>1.9. Employee redeployment and reskilling is widely needed.</p> <p>1.10. Transforming to a 60/40 in-person/out-of-office experience and, eventually, to 40/60.</p> <p>LEADERSHIP:</p> <p>1.11. Desired qualities in leadership: (a) going forward, resilience and agility; (b) generalists solve complex issues that are multidisciplinary in nature; (c) calm & prudent leaders, driving optimism and inspiration.</p> <p>1.12. CEOs as leaders in the crisis: (a) managing in the background (very visible but not needed), (b) rebuilding the partnership between the private sector and the public sector through constructive dialogue (government, business & civil society).</p>

Table 6. Opinions of prominent business leaders in relation to effective coping
with the crisis by companies – content analysis (cont'd)

(1)	(2)
2. Hubert Joly, a former chairman and CEO of Best Buy	<p>CHANGE & CULTURE: 2.1. Assessing company's reason for being (milestones: purpose and humanity, the link to competitive advantage, and managing stakeholders during the current crisis and beyond it).</p> <p>2.2. Incorporating the needs of all stakeholders into the organization's leadership choices.</p> <p>2.3. Transposing the purpose to key stakeholders (i.e. formulating a second purpose) in order to partner with them.</p> <p>2.4. Emphasizing win-win situations in stakeholder interactions.</p> <p>2.5. Treating shareholders as customers (sharing with them, making proposals to them, being transparent in actions)</p> <p>CRISIS MANAGEMENT: 2.6. Steps in implementing an organizational turnaround during the crisis: (a) addressing key operational-performance drivers (listening to the opinions of front liners), (b) creating a joyous, growth-oriented culture, human environment with a strong sense of employee belonging, (c) formulating a noble purpose.</p> <p>2.7. Balancing the mix of long-term and short-term orientations in different spheres of the company.</p> <p>ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT: 2.8. Formulating shades in meaning of <i>noble purpose</i>: (a) what the world needs (customer needs), (b) what the company is good at (proven abilities to achieve competitive advantage), (c) how the company believes, it can make a positive difference in the world, and (d) how the company can make money (its growth and profit engine).</p> <p>2.9. The right approach for the company: formulating a purpose, a long-term strategy, taking care of all stakeholders, and doing well by doing well to them.</p> <p>HRM: 2.10. Strong relations between individual purposes and the organizational purpose.</p> <p>LEADERSHIP: 2.11. The core of organizational leadership: the use of a balanced scorecard with key performance indicators, focused on: (a) customers (a customer-satisfaction score or revenue per customer, (b) employee engagement and turnover, (c) relationships with vendors, (d) company's impact on (reputation in) the community, (e) financial performance.</p> <p>2.12. Desired characteristics of leaders: (a) persons who lead with their brain, their heart, their soul, and their guts, (b) creators of environment where mistakes are allowed and employees may succeed.</p> <p>2.13. Leaders' performance is measured by how employees are treated, how customers and communities are dealt with, and not so much by share price or earnings guidance.</p>
3. Mike Henry, the CEO of BHP	<p>CHANGE & CULTURE: 3.1. Strong, win-win relationships among the company, its employees, communities, business partners (incl. suppliers), traditional owner groups, host governments, etc. predetermine business resilience.</p> <p>CRISIS MANAGEMENT/ ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT: 3.2. Social value is important in decision making: (a) balancing of long-term interests of stakeholders does not contradict to pursuing short-term financial or operational performance, (b) safety and operational performance are no more viewed as opposites, (c) the priorities, regarding the creation of social value are assessed by the degree of relevance to the business, and company's ability to make impact.</p> <p>HRM: 3.3. Prioritizing people by getting out, demonstrating empathy, and engaging with stakeholders (not only employees) to understand their concerns.</p> <p>LEADERSHIP: 3.4. Good leadership practices: (a) creating clarity on organizational priorities, some sense of certainty and hope for the employees, (b) demonstrating responsiveness and fluidity to the dynamics of the evolving crisis, (c) seeing the big picture, (d) adhering to context-specific leadership, (e) relying on capable people and a good culture.</p> <p>3.5. Appropriate roles of leaders: (a) providing context, perspective, and clarity on priorities, (b) getting support in the company, (c) getting out of the way of contributors, and (d) abstaining from the role of chief problem solver for the company.</p>
Sources: [10, 11, 12].	

Another key aspect of leadership, applied to disclose its manifestations during the current crisis, is revealed by adopting the depth perspective, i.e. analyzing it at organizational and individual level. The analysis of organizational leadership outlines successful overall development strategies and tactics, implemented by leading companies in their efforts to adapt to the current unfavorable conditions and prepare for “the next normal”. The results of case studies and empirical research disclose the necessity of conducting a thorough and simultaneous reassessment of company postures in relation with at least several strategy components as dynamic redeployment of talent, pivoting production, shifting operations to greater flexibility, launching new business models, and multiplying productivity. The desired changes in the aforementioned strategy components may be achieved predominantly by design and implementation of deliberate acceleration in speed through adopting of new ways of working, i.e. removing boundaries and silos, simplifying the structures in business organizations, introducing concrete measures for decision-making process acceleration, intensifying the relationship “manager-employee” by scheduling more time in direct (electronic) connection between them, applying new technology in business, matching the best people in the firm with the hardest issues to be (re-)(ab-)solved, relying heavily on cross-functional teams, and developing agile, resilient talent [13].

Another set of components, constituting the overall development strategy of the company that struggles to survive, prosper and retain the level of organizational excellence under Covid-19 pandemic, is identified, based on the logic presumption that this key marker event incarnates a great disruption for a number of industries [14]. These include adequate investment in core and emerging technologies, proactive preparation for losing the company benefits of some regulatory advantages, reassessment of relationships with customers and other stakeholders, and embracement of robust technology platforms (i.e. custom IT services, cloud providers, mobile network operators, and application developers) that are the means of company’s increasing its scalability, customization and its price advantage.

Special attention is paid to outlining important characteristics of adequate crisis management strategies, designed and implemented by companies in order to facilitate their reactions “to unfolding events, communicating, and extracting and applying learnings” [15]. Furthermore, diverse sets of varying tactics, implemented by contemporary business organizations in order to ensure safety to key stakeholders and maintain their profitability, are outlined in an empirical research by Sadun et.al [16]. In an attempt to decrease the observed great diversity of identified company tactics of coping in the current crisis, the scientists review, classify and critically analyze them. Thus, the researchers are able to ground the existence of some “shared common underlying principles” that are embedded in all these tactics. The strategic characteristics and shared principles may be viewed as an efficient means of retaining the success in the entity [15, 16, 17, 18] (see Table 7).

Table 7. Characteristics & principles of successful crisis management strategies, adopted by companies

<i>Strategy characteristic or principle</i>	<i>Description</i>
(1)	(2)
<i>Company intelligence</i>	Realizing daily updates of information. Changing the corporate stance, if needed.
<i>Attention to news cycles</i>	Balancing between newness & big picture. Developing a more calibrated view to news, challenges, etc. Critical appraisal of the essence and source of acquired (changing) information. Precisely categorize incoming information (facts, hypotheses & speculations).

Table 7. Characteristics & principles of successful crisis management strategies, adopted by companies (cont'd)

(1)	(2)
<i>Regular updation of summary of facts and their implications</i>	Spare time from employee doubting in the veracity of facts. The employees make no assumptions about facts. High effectiveness and clarity in communicating with all constituencies.
<i>Applying multi-sourcing and casting suspicions on expert opinions and forecasts</i>	High unpredictability and uniqueness of each pandemic. Orientation to learning about its critical features, adopting an iterative, empirical approach (what happens?, what works?).
<i>Constantly reframing the comprehension of what's happening</i>	Creating and maintaining a living digital document, time-stamped by "best current view".
<i>Considering company bureaucracy with respect to communications</i>	Establish a small team of trusted employees, empowered to make rapid tactical decisions, regarding crisis communications. The key marker events from (business) environment pace the internal processes in the company.
<i>Target dimensions, balancing the corporate crisis response (through implemented policies)</i>	Communications, Employee needs, Travel, Remote work, Supply-chain stabilization, Business tracking and forecasting. The attitude to the business environment (i.e. cooperating with the broader range of constituencies, incl. competitors, and the higher rank systems).
<i>Embedding resilience principles in new or updated company policies</i>	<i>Resilience: "the ability to survive and thrive through unpredictable, changing, and potentially unfavorable events" [15].</i> Six common characteristics of resilient organizations to track: Redundancy, Diversity, Modularity, Evolvability (constant improvement in congruence with new opportunities, problems, or information), Prudence (scenario planning & testing resilience), and Embeddedness (holistically view to stakeholders).
<i>Preparation for the next (phase of the) crisis and preemption of emerging crisis-related events.</i>	Demonstrating proactive company behavior, based on organizational learning and quick adaptation. Planning of scenarios and practicing game simulations for crisis. Realizing of cumulative learnings and adaptations from previous crises in order to prepare the company for existence in a new, changed world after the current crisis.
<i>Multiple adapting and shifting the value proposition of the company</i>	The company has to reflect the continuously changing demand conditions. Leadership pursues new growth opportunities.
<i>Adapted HRM</i>	An emphasis on two complementary streams of leadership efforts in keeping: (a) the viability of the company (reshaping production and sales function) and (b) employees' safety and well-being. Leaders creatively search for new ways of interaction between humans and technology, relying on a mix of internal and remote leadership. Building appropriate skills and mindsets for employees to solve pending problems on their jobs.
<i>High speed of organizational activities</i>	<i>Speed: "getting things done fast, and well" [17].</i> Rethinking ways of working (accelerate decision-making process, delegation of rights and empowerment of employees, establishing new forms of engaging partnerships with constituencies). Changing organizational structures (flat, team based, hybrid work). Reshaping talent (leadership development, organizational learning, senior management increase their input as visionaries and energizers of their followers).
Sources: [15, 16, 17, 18].	

Assessing leadership and leaders at individual level during Covid-19 pandemic discloses a bundle of approaches to coping with pending issues as undertaken or prescribed for implementation strategies or strategic moves, initiated steps, demonstrated styles, recommended roles and/or behaviors, and cherished personal characteristics. For example by reviewing contemporary scientific and professional literature in the field of leadership Love [19] justified the utilization of some leadership styles, grounded on modern leadership theories (Table 8). Rao and Sutton [20] go even further by prescribing concrete behaviors, containing respective nuances, appropriate for business leaders under the current conditions, i.e.:

- Taking personal accountability while adhering to solve important and urgent organizational issues.
- Demonstrating care and compassion in order to gain the emotional and physical support of their employees in turning upsetting decisions into organizational reality, and decrease employee stress levels.
- “Re-onboarding” of all subordinates, aimed at the establishment of flexible cultures in which the success originates from the strengths and quirks of each employee.

Furthermore, Craven et.al [23] recommend to leaders in business organizations to apply specific messages and actions to different personnel categories (level, role, and geographic location), relying on appropriate adaptation of the so called “influence model” (understanding and conviction, reinforcement with formal mechanisms, confidence and skill building, role modeling) in order to change leadership and employee mindsets in desired direction. Other researchers even underline the heroism of the contemporary succeeding business leaders by comparing their demonstrated mindset to “a wartime” one, structured as a unique mix of “decisive crisis management, scenario planning and a human reflex” to emerging safety and economic issues [24].

Table 8. Appropriate leadership styles for the pandemic situation

Leadership style	Key nuances in its essence, facilitating leaders’ ability to cope with the crisis
<i>Servant Leadership</i>	Searching for a balance between the strategic facet and the operational facet of leadership. Simultaneous orientation to doing the right things and doing things right. Leaders are expected to serve and support the employees in their endeavors to satisfy successfully the clients of the company (i.e. ensuring clarity and transposition of the corporate purpose statement and values at each lower level of the organizational structure).
<i>Inclusive Leadership</i>	Leaders are expected to understand employee needs clearly. The unlocking of human potential should become a top priority for leaders. Leaders should have inclusive conversations with all the stakeholders.
<i>Decolonized Leadership</i>	Leaders should embrace a specific approach to their constituencies, i.e. of connecting, relating and belonging.
<i>Positive Leadership</i>	Leaders should create a radically positive environment, viewing at the organization as a system of diverse tensions.
<i>Anti-Racist Leadership</i>	Leaders should take steps to dismantle the systems of oppression on minority groups and marginalized communities. Leaders should become comfortable with being uncomfortable. Leaders should take the initiative to steer the company into discomfort in order to pursue organizational growth.
Source: [19].	

As far as the appropriate leadership qualities for the current pandemic are concerned, several sets of them have been already constructed:

- Four interrelated leadership qualities: awareness, vulnerability, empathy, and compassion [8].
- Two sets of simultaneously possessed personal qualities by succeeding leaders: (a) smart, confident, daring and (b) kind, humble, caring [21].
- Resilient, bold, empathetic and ethical, oriented to problem solving in the spheres as inclusion, equality, social justice, and transition to net-zero economy [22].

The perspective of the must-be-performed roles by leaders is also used as an appropriate means to outline the commonality in their specific trails to organizational survival and prosperity in unique companies and diverse industries, as follows:

- A set of two intertwined and wisely applied roles is identified, based on the level of visibility of exerted efforts by the leaders [21]: (a) The highly visible leadership activities include inspiration and assurance of respective teammates by promoting hope and vision, empathy and public commitment. (b) The covert leadership activities deal with daily reflecting on and coping with diverse aspects (financial, technological and human) of the sharpest current issues in a disciplined manner. The simultaneous, balanced performance of the aforementioned two roles is prescribed to be achieved by means of adhering to concrete behavioral norms as “Acknowledge the crisis in a serious way”, “Embrace the crisis as a team”, “Explain why and how you made decisions”, “Measure and adapt your strategies” [21].
- Assigning the role of attacker to the succeeding contemporary leader in the crisis, putting an emphasis on creative thinking, pursuing new opportunities and new markets, active portfolio management [22].

The business consulting experience of Pachod and Park [24] from the first six months of the current crisis permits them to propose persistently certain strategies or strategic moves to leaders in the companies, striving to survive and prosper in dangerous and hostile environment (table 9).

Table 9. Several strategic moves for succeeding leaders in the Covid-19 crisis

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Measures, comprising the respective strategy</i>
Develop the leader's team of the future	Transitioning from long tenure in the organization and experience of leaders to persistent demonstration of outperformance as the main criteria for their promotion. Adhering to empathetic leadership and supporting diverse talent.
Identify and elevate key, tangible business skills	Leaders manage for a greater transformation. Leaders collaborate in a network of teams in order to get closer to customers and increase the agility of their company. Leader do not forget business fundamentals (cash flows, business cases, scenario thinking). Leaders introduce fast new business models. Leaders discuss and change supply chains.
Treat technological acumen in the same way as profit targets	Developing and measuring the technological skills of all leaders in the company as digitalization milestones are reached.
Liberate teams to solve problems rapidly from a customer-back perspective	Decisions are made faster by small teams of leaders.
Source [24].	

Some researchers even concentrate their interest only on the potential contributions of the highest rank leaders in companies (the CEOs) in generating appropriate organizational responses to the current crisis [25, 26]. For example Dewar et.al [25] propose four strategic moves to the CEOs, that are accompanied by respective sets of questions to reflect on and plan the needed behavioral changes in congruence with the ongoing conditions, i.e. formulating and pursuing higher (“10x”) aspirations (bigger, faster and bolder ones; substituting travel and commuting time for formulating and implementing aspirations), decreasing the gap between leader’s words and timely actions (with orientation to leading with greater humanity, boosting employee morale, making transparent decisions, providing vision and empowerment), adopting a balanced approach to the full set of diverse constituencies, utilizing the full benefits from participation in peer networks to (re-)(ab-)solve important organizational issues [25]. Furthermore, the prescribed “microhabits” to the CEOs in this crisis by Hatami et.al [26] may be used to enlarge the list of the appropriate strategic moves for them – i.e. taking care of themselves (i.e. to maintain their mental and physical stamina, introduce necessary changes in their work schedules, intensify their communications in a safe way), and personally demonstrate social responsible behavior and actions.

3. Conclusion

The performed literature review and content analysis permits identifying six main aspects of leadership, emerging under the conditions of Covid-19 pandemic and resulting from business leaders’ assiduous attempts of coping with pending organizational issues and overwhelming challenges (see Figure 1).

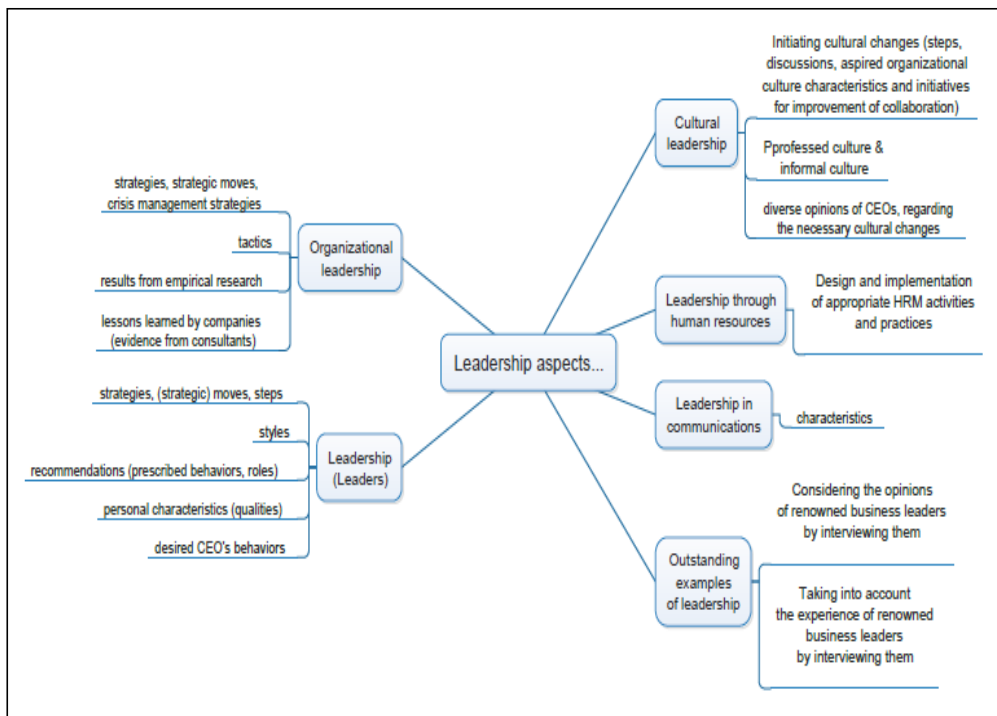


Fig. 1. The mind map of leadership, adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic

The forming depth perspective in outlining the emerging bundle of leadership facets is oriented to organizational and individual levels only, but the team level still seems neglected. Furthermore, there exists strong recommendation for collaboration among business organizations not only within certain value-chains that seems embedded only in the activities of highest rank executives (CEOs) in relation to their peers.

As far as the potential cultural changes in business organizations are concerned, it is evident that although reformulation of certain components of the official company culture is prescribed (i.e. purpose, mission and vision), these changes are reflected only through the lens of (re-)(ab-)solving pending business-related issues, originating from the new crisis. In fact the emphasis is put on the first stages in solving the basic organizational issue of adapting to the external environment, i.e. reflection on the current characteristics of the dominating company culture, having discussions with stakeholders whose interests are affected and staking on the assessed strengths of the dominating company culture in congruence with the current pandemic. Although many organizations claim to have undertaken and even completed deep changes in their business models and attitudes to their constituencies, it cannot be confirmed that the aspired new leadership behaviors, related to these changes, have become engrained in the minds of respective decision-makers and performers (followers) as the right ways to act, think and feel in relation to the performed activities.

The conquering of the leadership position through human resources seems inevitable in spite of the current pandemic and because of its occurrence, since it represents the only one sustainable competitive advantage for the contemporary companies. But now it becomes quite clear that the previously neglected in many industries component of “ensuring safety and healthy work conditions” as a part of an implemented and elaborated HRM system in the business organization comes to the foreground. The leaders’ main aim of securing the business continuity of the respective entity under the new conditions (some of them later on may be transformed into “the new normal”) also requires demonstrating assiduousness and creativity in finding new personnel members and timely adapting them to the new organizational and supply-chain situation, onboarding all current employees to boost their performance levels within the new hostile and highly digitalized business environment.

As far as the leadership in organizational communications is concerned, four aspects should be obligatory outlined, i.e. its strong association with full utilizing the potential of human resources, the pursuing of high extent of its congruence with the respective stage of the crisis, considering the peculiarities of human psychology during crisis events even in business context, and the efficiency of the implemented communication technology.

The critical analysis of advises by outstanding business leaders outlines the importance of at least several important topics for executives, performing comparatively successfully during the early stages of this crisis, to reflect on. These are the relationship “change & culture”, crisis management, holistic organizational management, the special accent on human resource management, and leadership that seems quite normal at this stage.

In conclusion, the past nine months of coping with the Covid-19 pandemic constitute only an early stage in its development that makes its prognostication almost impossible. Nevertheless, the literature review and content analysis, applied in this scientific paper, clearly reveals that the ambitious leaders in the companies have been assiduously trying to find their specific success trails and better prepare their organizational reactions and proactive actions not only in relation with the current crisis, but also regarding the emergence of unexpected events with great business impact in the future. It can be concluded with certainty that the content of presented bundle of leadership aspects, appropriate for coping with the Covid-19 crisis, will undergo numerous modifications, according to the changes, incurring in the business environment and the decisions, taken by senior executives in the companies.

References

1. O'boyle, E and Hickman, A: 3 Ways to Create a Necessary Culture Shift Amid COVID-19, Gallup, 6th of May, 2020, available at: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/309485/ways-create-necessary-culture-shift-amid-covid.aspx?version=print>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
2. Sundaram, D and Barrett, H: 4 Strategies to Build Business Resilience Before the Next Disruption, Gallup, 5th of August, 2020, available at: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/316325/strategies-build-business-resilience-next-disruption.aspx?version=print>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
3. Forrester, D, Hillman, P and McDevitt E: Culture After COVID-19: What is the future of corporate culture and the employer-employee social contract?, Human Synergistics international, Culture university blog, Jun 30, 2020, available at: <https://www.humansynergistics.com/blog/culture-university/details/culture-university/2020/06/30/culture-after-covid-19-what-is-the-future-of-corporate-culture-and-the-employer-employee-social-contract>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
4. THRUUE: Corporate Culture After COVID-19: Rewriting the social contract, Global Leadership Survey, May 28, 2020, available at: <https://www.thruue.com/culture-after-covid/>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
5. Bravery, K et.al: Global Talent Trends: Win with empathy, Mercer, 68 pages, 2020, available at: <https://www.mercer.com/our-thinking/career/global-talent-hr-trends.html#contactForm>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
6. Disselkamp, L.: COVID-19 and reassessing workforce management, Workforce.com, HR Administration, available at: https://www.workforce.com/news/covid-19-and-reassessing-workforce-management?utm_campaign=ED_WF_WF, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
7. Hancock, B and Schaninger, B: HR says talent is crucial for performance – and the pandemic proves it, McKinsey & Company, section: Organization practice, July 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/hr-says-talent-is-crucial-for-performance-and-the-pandemic-proves-it>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
8. De Smet, A: Your organization is grieving—here's how you can help, McKinsey Quarterly, September 2020, 4 pages, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/your-organization-is-grieving-heres-how-you-can-help>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
9. Mendy, A, Stewart, M L and VanAkin, K: A leader's guide: Communicating with teams, stakeholders, and communities during COVID-19, McKinsey & Company, section: Organization Practice, 9 pages, April 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/a-leaders-guide-communicating-with-teams-stakeholders-and-communities-during-covid-19>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
10. D'Auria, G: Stay visible—but don't be needed: How Alain Bejjani is leading through the unexpected, McKinsey Quarterly, section: Our Insights, 6 pages, August 3, 2020 | Interview, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/stay-visible-but-dont-be-needed-how-alain-bejjani-is-leading-through-the-unexpected>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
11. Simpson, B: Leading with purpose and humanity: A conversation with Hubert Joly, McKinsey quarterly, section: Strategy & Corporate Finance Practice, 6 pages, June 18, 2020 | Interview, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/leading-with-purpose-and-humanity-a-conversation-with-hubert-joly>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
12. Görner, S: Prioritize people in times of crisis: An interview with the CEO of BHP, McKinsey Quarterly, section: Featured Insights, 5 pages, August 13, 2020 | Interview, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/asia-pacific/prioritize-people-in-times-of-crisis-an-interview-with-the-ceo-of-bhp>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
13. McKinsey & company: The right organization for the next normal, Covid-19: Briefing materials. Global health and crisis response, pp.34-39, July 6th 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Risk/Our%20Insights/COVID%2019%20Implications%20for%20business/COVID%2019%20July%209/COVID-19-Facts-and-Insights-July-6.pdf>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.

14. Nunes, P, Rippert, A and Larry Downes: Five Strategies Every Leader Must Embrace to Harness Disruption, MIT Sloan Management Review, August 27, 2020, available at: https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/five-strategies-every-leader-must-embrace-to-harness-disruption/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Five, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
15. Reeves, M, Lang, N and Carlsson-Szlezak, P: Lead Your Business Through the Coronavirus crisis, HBR, section: Crisis management, February 27, 2020, available at: <https://hbr.org/2020/02/lead-your-business-through-the-coronavirus-crisis>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
16. Sadun, R, Bertoni, A, Delfino, A, Fassio, G and Testa M: Restarting Under Uncertainty: Managerial Experiences from Around the World, Harvard Business School, Working Knowledge. Business research for business leaders, section: Research & Ideas, 14th of July 2020, available at: <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/restarting-under-uncertainty-managerial-experiences-from-around-the-world>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
17. De Smet, A, Pachthod, D, Relyea, C and Sternfels, B: Ready, set, go: Reinventing the organization for speed in the post-COVID-19 era, pp21-28, in What now? Decisive actions to emerge stronger in the next normal, McKinsey & Company, September 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/what-now-decisive-actions-to-emerge-stronger-in-the-next-normal>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
18. McKinsey & Company: Risk Practice COVID-19 and the great reset: Briefing note #18, August 13th, 2020, available at: <https://www.giuseppedaghino.com/allegati/covid-19-briefing-note-18-august-13-2020.pdf>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
19. Love, A: Five Leadership Styles for Weathering Crisis, August 25, 2020, Berret-Koehler Publishers, available at: <https://ideas.bkconnection.com/five-leadership-styles-for-weathering-crisis>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
20. Rao, H and Sutton, R: From a room called fear to a room called hope: A leadership agenda for troubled times, McKinsey & Company, 8 pages, July, 9th, 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/from-a-room-called-fear-to-a-room-called-hope-a-leadership-agenda-for-troubled-times>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
21. Abadir, S: The Two Roles Leaders Must Play in a Crisis, MIT Sloan Management Review, September 22, 2020, available at: https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-two-roles-leaders-must-play-in-a-crisis/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=The, accessed on: 23.09.2020.
22. Hunt, D V, Sneider, K and Sternfels, B: Business in 2020 and beyond, The next normal. The future of business: Reimagining 2020 and beyond, McKinsey & Company, pp2-3, July 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/business-in-2020-and-beyond>, accessed on: 23.09.2020.
23. Craven, M, Fong, A, Lauricella, T and Tan, T: The long haul: How leaders can shift mindsets and behaviors to reopen safely, McKinsey & Company, section: Organization Practice, 9 pages, July 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Organization/Our%20Insights/The%20long%20haul%20How%20leaders%20can%20shift%20mindsets%20and%20behaviors%20to%20reopen%20safely/The-long-haul-How-leaders-can-shift-mindsets-and-behavior-to-reopen-safely.pdf>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
24. Pachthod D and Park, M: To lead in the postcrisis tomorrow, put leadership and capabilities in place today, McKinsey & Company, section: McKinsey Accelerate, 5 pages, July 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-accelerate/our-insights/to-lead-in-the-postcrisis-tomorrow-put-leadership-and-capabilities-in-place-today>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
25. Dewar, C, Keller, S, Sneider, K and Strovink, K: The CEO moment: Leadership for a new era, McKinsey Quarterly, McKinsey & Company, 12 pages, July 21, 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/the-ceo-moment-leadership-for-a-new-era>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.
26. Hatami, H, Sjatil, P E and Sneider, K: The toughest leadership test, McKinsey & Company, 6 pages, May 28, 2020, available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/the-toughest-leadership-test>, accessed on: 07.10.2020.